



State Representative Steve Conway

2008 Legislative Report

29th District



The 2008 sixty-day session has come to an end, and the results will have a great and positive impact on our communities in many ways. This year we continued to build on significant investments made in the past several sessions in Early Learning and our schools. We expanded educational opportunities for working families and youth. We continued to invest in our communities through our capital and transportation budgets and provide incentives to our core trade, aerospace, and high-tech industries.

This is, in part, why I believe Washington's economy continues to outpace that of most other states. We are by no means recession-proof here, but we are certainly beating the odds thanks to smart investments and an open government.

The results of the 2008 legislative session will also help us weather the rough economic times we may face with smart investments and a sound budget – we're saving over \$800 million in reserves to see us through the storm. Yet at the same time, we made important policy changes dealing with our housing crisis, health care access, and our military and veterans. We also sought to make our neighborhoods safer with new crack-downs on gangs and sex offenders.

My newsletter seeks to give you a brief summary of what made this a positive legislative session for Washington. I always welcome your input so please don't hesitate to contact us if you need further information.

Thanks again for the opportunity to serve you,

Steve Conway
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Committee Assignments:

Commerce and Labor - *Chair*

Appropriations

Finance

Select Committee on Pension Policy - *Chair*

Labor and Workforce Development Committee, National
Conference of State Legislators

Educational Opportunities

The 2008 supplemental operating budget adds about \$101 million in additional spending for our state's public schools. We continued to fund Tacoma's and other schools' initiatives to set up all-day kindergarten. We also added \$15.8 million to assist students in districts with high concentrations of



low-income and bilingual students in meeting state and federal achievement goals. In addition, public school employees and teachers will see increased salaries in this budget.

To ensure all students' success, the Legislature has enhanced career and technical education in secondary schools by enhancing funding for K-12

skill-based training and providing incentives for the development of programs to assist our youth in finding pathways to our trades and skill-based jobs. We also boosted funding for school library services and materials.

In addition, we're promoting healthier diets for Washington children and supporting local and mid-sized Washington farms by setting up a partnership with local schools. This new law creates new relationships between local farmers and public schools, encouraging our farmers to sell locally and get fresh fruits and vegetables to our schools and area food banks. Healthier food grown locally is a win-win for our kids our farmers, and our environment.

Health Care: Making it More Affordable and Accessible

After eight years of allowing health insurers to set their premium rates for individual health plans without prior review by the Insurance Commissioner, we restored the authority of the Insurance Commissioner to review insurance company premiums to ensure they are reasonable. This was a major victory.

This supplemental budget also continues additional funding for these efforts:

- Long-Term Care Alternatives: +\$2.9 million
- Nursing Home Improvements: +\$3 million
- Health Insurance Partnership/Subsidies for Small Business: +\$2.24 million
- Adult Dental Access Grant: +\$2 million
- Health Care Provider Loan Repayment: +\$1.25 million
- Primary Care Medical Homes: +\$409,000
- Family Planning Support: +\$5 million
- Full funding for Substance Abuse pilot programs: +\$4.3 million

Investments in Washington

In the past year, Washington State, unlike most of the country, added 50,000 new jobs. These jobs are in family-wage sectors of our economy – manufacturing and professional services. This explains the strength of our economy despite the problems in the construction and retail industries. The 2008 Legislature continued to invest in these growth sectors.

To boost our aerospace industry, we extended aerospace tax programs to some parts manufacturers, repair stations, and design and engineering services. Many of these companies are small- to medium-sized businesses that provide many family wage jobs throughout Washington.

In order to meet the workforce demands of that industry, we're also putting \$3 million into an aerospace apprenticeship program, through the state Board of Community and Technical Colleges, to support program and curriculum development, training, equipment, plus 130 enrollments at up to three community and technical colleges.

We have also added funding for loans to small manufacturers and small businesses to assist them in competing in a global economy, as well as funding for the "Green Jobs Bill" to train and transition workers to clean-energy jobs.



Investments in Pierce County

I was very happy my colleagues in the House and Senate agreed to invest millions more in and around Pierce County, in order to draw more bright students and more business to the region. Some of the investments made this year include:

- \$500,000 more for the South Tacoma Hope Center Projects
- \$2 million more for UW Tacoma to expand and buy more property
- \$3 million for a new Pierce County Skills Center to increase access to higher education
- \$3.5 million for up-grades at Western State Hospital



We also took quick action this session to waive the state

sales tax on construction of a new headquarters building for the Russell Investments headquarters – but only if it's built in downtown Tacoma. We value their presence in our community and want to do everything we can to keep the international investment firm in Tacoma and Pierce County, providing valuable jobs and revenue to our economy.

One of the most important investments we're making is funding for new ferries to serve Puget Sound commuters and residents. Some of these ferries will be built right here at the Tacoma shipyards, providing good-paying jobs to our residents and a boost to our local economy.

Building a Family- Wage Economy

I chair the House Commerce and Labor Committee. That means I preside over a committee that deals with everything from apprenticeships and problem gambling, to workforce training and unemployment insurance reform. This year we passed nearly twenty bills dealing with business-licensing law for realtors and accountants, apprenticeships for operating engineers and cosmetologists, and collective bargaining for graduate-level academic employees and the State Patrol. These bills help create family-wage jobs in our trades and professions.

We also made progress on issues important to working families. The committee I chair continued to work on collective bargaining for childcare workers and a plan to provide leave for families with newborns.



I made sure we passed a new law ensuring a worker who has been granted benefits because of an injury on the job, or because of a job-related sickness, continues to receive benefits if the worker's employer appeals the decision to grant those benefits. Unfortunately, the law currently allows self-insured employers to suspend benefits to workers simply because they decide to appeal the decision. The purpose of the law is to allow workers to heal in comfort before returning to the workforce.

One of my greatest disappointments this session was the failure by the Legislature to allow collective bargaining with the state for childcare center



employees. We want only the best childcare providers looking after our children but without a decent wage, it's difficult to retain them. I vow to continue this fight next year.

Tax credit: Low-income working families will see some assistance in new policy

A new working-families tax credit was approved this session to send a helping hand to hundreds of thousands of Washington citizens. This new public policy is aimed at assisting lower-income families – especially families with children. Over the decades, our state has granted many tax benefits that, in theory at least, provide incentives for business. This one’s for people.

The new policy creates a state sales-tax rebate for those receiving the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (or EITC) that amounts to a percentage of the federal Earned Income Tax Credit. Eligible citizens must file a federal income-tax return, receive an EITC, and have lived here in Washington for more than 180 days in the year when the exemption is claimed. Folks must also pay sales tax in the year when the exemption is claimed. The Legislature will trigger the tax exemption in years of revenue and economic growth.

In my opinion, this new Washington state policy helps real people who have earned it and who need it most.

Fighting Street Gangs

After hearing compelling – and sometimes tragic - testimony from police, prosecutors, and victims, we came up with a three-pronged plan to push gangs out of our neighborhoods.

First, we must stop gangs from recruiting new members. Second, we must rescue gang members who are looking for a way out. Our communities need the support and resources to help provide opportunities beyond street life for these kids and young adults. Lastly, our law enforcement needs the resources available to pursue existing gangs, from gang suppression to graffiti cleanup. Our new law increases penalties for adult gang members who recruit juveniles to commit felony offenses and establishes a temporary witness assistance program to assist prosecutors and citizens who help bring gang members to justice.

Homeownership: Free counseling is available to answer your questions

This year, we made monumental strides in expanding opportunities to find homes, especially for working families on fixed incomes.



- \$50 million for the Housing Trust Fund, a proven investment strategy to support the development of more affordable housing in the state.
- \$10 million for the Rapid Response Program, so we don’t lose opportunities to preserve or secure affordable housing when they’re available.
- \$10 million in the Capital Budget for the Nonprofit Equity Program, to promote workforce housing and to ensure that government resources are targeted to keep housing affordable for the longest period of time.

We’ve also partnered with the Gates Foundation and 17 other organizations that have provided private-sector matching dollars for service-enriched housing for homeless families with children. Through the Washington Families Fund, we’re providing a \$6 million infusion of state support to help an additional 4,500 families out of homelessness over the next 10 years.

The new Washington Homeownership Information Hotline and Counseling Program provides free counseling for Washington citizens who are either thinking about buying a home or want assistance figuring out how to solve their mortgage troubles.

The Legislature created the program to help residents learn more about homeownership, mortgages and related matters. If you’d like some more information, don’t hesitate to call the toll-free hotline at 1-877-894-HOME (4663), or click the program’s Web site at www.homeownership.wa.gov.

Cracking down on Sex Offenders

Every week it seems there are more sex offenders released and moving into our area. To protect families against these sex offenders, we worked with police, prosecutors and victim advocates this session to create a package of reforms designed to catch more sex offenders, convict more offenders, monitor all sex offenders in the community, and provide help to victims.

The biggest problem today with sex offenders is those who’ve served their time and are back on the street. We passed laws to keep better track of released offenders and expanded the state’s DNA database to help our law enforcement account for all levels of sex offenders.

Supporting our Veterans and their Families

In times such as these, it is right for our government to do all it can to support our military troops, our National Guard members, and their families.

I supported efforts this year to bring property tax relief to veterans, allowing them to deduct their disability benefits from their income eligibility.

As Chair of the Commerce and Labor committee, I helped pass a new law that allows the spouses of our military men and women to take 15 days of unpaid leave before a deployment or when their spouse is on leave. It is only right to allow our military families to be together during these critical times. Those families that sacrifice so much for us should not suffer any adverse consequences for asking for time off from their employers.

Protecting Children from Toxic Toys

Following last summer’s recall of millions of toys containing lead paint, House Democrats acted to protect children from the most dangerous toxic chemicals in children’s products: lead, cadmium, and phthalates. This bill targets manufacturers, enables the Department of Ecology to assess toxicity of additional chemicals, and establishes a consumer awareness campaign about chemicals of concern. It’s the best protection in the United States for parents who want to protect their children from toxic chemicals in the products they buy.

We also took steps to work with businesses and communities to address climate change as well as growing the “Green” Economy.



Rep. Conway joins local police and firefighters at the Tacoma Police Dept., where Gov. Gregoire signed into law their new pension benefit increase, as well as tough new laws cracking down on sex offenders.

2008 Session Available “On Demand” in Web Video

TVW, the statewide cable television network that provides unedited gavel-to-gavel coverage of the State Legislature, maintains a comprehensive web video archive of all the committee hearings and floor debates of the 2008 legislative session: WWW.TVW.ORG

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